



Association of
Environmental Professionals

2021–2022 Public Policy Program

The Association of Environmental Professionals is:

A not-for-profit association founded in 1974 by public and private sector professionals with a common interest in serving the principles underlying the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The specific and primary purposes of the association are to establish and operate a professional association of persons involved in and committed to improving the processing and implementation of environmental assessment, analysis, and reporting.

The AEP Membership:

- Our membership consists of environmental professionals with expertise in environmental sciences, air quality, biology, archaeology and paleontology, land use planning, transportation, engineering, land use and environmental law, and other disciplines integral to the environmental review process.
- Our role is to represent common interests of environmental professionals, including but not limited to private consultants, public officials, and federal, state, regional, and local government staff.
- Our members are responsible for implementation of California's most important environmental protection laws, including CEQA, the California Endangered Species Act, the Global Warming Solutions Act, the Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act, the Planning and Zoning Law, and many others.
- We recognize that diversity and inclusion make our organization stronger and AEP welcomes and encourages all environmental professionals to participate in our organization.

Mission of AEP:

To enhance, maintain, and protect the quality of natural and human environment; encourage and carry on research and education for the benefit of the public and concerned professionals in all fields related to environmental planning and analysis; improve communication and advance the state of the art among people who deal with the environmental planning, analysis and evaluation process; and improve public awareness and involvement in the environmental planning, analysis, and review process.



Enhance,
Maintain, &
Protect the Natural and
Human Environment

Vision of the Public Policy Program:

- To provide technical and policy expertise in the development of legislative proposals to maintain and enhance laws and regulations to protect the quality of the natural and built environments through the application of good science, careful planning, and informed decision-making.
- To lead in the design and implementation of sound environmental planning, analysis, and evaluation processes.
- To support balanced and informed decision-making through the timely and efficient implementation of CEQA's procedural requirements.

Serving AEP Membership and the Environment By:

- Improving communication among environmental planning professionals and promoting the use and reliance of science in the practice of environmental planning, analysis, and evaluation.
- Encouraging and supporting research and educational programs beneficial to the public interest in environmental management and planning.
- Enhancing, maintaining, and protecting the natural and human environments.
- Supporting environmental justice in our practice through the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
- Develop ways to attract people of color to our profession through various means including, but not limited to, participation in career fairs at the high school and college levels, and through offering scholarships and internships.
- Adoption of our Diversity and Inclusion Initiative to promote diversity and equity in our profession.

Legislative Platform

Legislative Principles:

- Serve the public and the legislative intent of CEQA by upholding public disclosure for CEQA documents.
- Foster the ethical practice environmental planning, analysis, and evaluation through our Code of Ethics.
- Encourage clear and implementable legislation through clarity and consistency in the statutory language.
- Ensure that thresholds and other metrics that are proposed in CEQA bills reflect the most current technology available, and that bills allow for advances in methodologies and technologies.
- Support the integration of environmental protection and planning by performing environmental analysis early in the process.
- Promote the use of good science as essential to protecting the public interest in the built and natural environments.
- Ensure that CEQA remains a useful policy tool for elected officials and the public.
- AEP supports and promotes inclusive communities offering various transit options and housing opportunities at all income levels.
- Carefully evaluate the broader implications of project-specific bills and project-specific exemptions to ensure they do not have unintended consequences to disadvantaged communities.

Legislative Goals:

- Encourage and promote legislative proposals that enhance, maintain, and protect the quality of the natural and human environments through smart environmental planning, analysis, and assessment, and eliminate inefficiencies in the environmental planning, analysis, and evaluation process.
- Serve as a resource to the Legislature to develop improvements to CEQA while maintaining protection of the environment.
- Support continued collaboration with the American Planning Association and other planning and environmental organizations to promote appropriate changes to CEQA.
- Support legislation that improves efficiency in CEQA compliance while maintaining environmental protection.
- Support the creation of an electronic library for all CEQA documents.
- Support legislation to curtail or limit abuse of the CEQA process for reasons other than environmental protection (e.g., economic, political).
- Support legislation to encourage timely submittal of comments in accordance with the public review periods mandated by CEQA.
- Support CEQA streamlining measures that promote the development of affordable housing in existing urban areas.
- Educate the public that the environmental review process is one part of an information continuum decision-makers rely on when deciding the future of land use, the environment, public health and safety, and the economic well-being of Californians. Other parts of this continuum include land use planning (general plans and specific plans), zoning, community values, and economic interests.
- Utilize the expertise of environmental professionals to assist the Legislature in improving California's environmental and planning laws.

Primary Areas of Interest:

- Protect the integrity of the California Environmental Quality Act.
- Serve the public interest through sound environmental planning and design.
- Support science-based environmental regulatory programs.
- Protect natural resources through best management practices that conserve and preserve sensitive environmental resources.
- Promote sustainable practices that minimize our "ecological footprint" and conserve finite resources for future generations.
- Support environmental justice, access to affordable housing, and promotion of economic opportunities within disadvantaged communities

AEP on the California Environmental Quality Act

Background

AEP was established as a professional organization for people involved in and committed to improving the processing and implementation of environmental assessment, analysis, and reporting.

CEQA establishes a process whereby state and local decision-makers in California holding discretionary authority to approve or deny actions or projects affecting the environment are informed and understand the range of environmental consequences resulting from those actions. When used as intended, CEQA fosters innovation and adaptation in land use, environmental planning, and project design. CEQA provides decision-makers with the information necessary to balance the needs for environmental protection and public interest in a strong economy and access to quality housing and healthy communities.

Core Values:

- Full disclosure and accountability for all relevant information in the CEQA process are essential.
- Fair and unbiased presentation of all relevant and available information in the CEQA review process is a fundamental duty of CEQA practitioners.
- Transparency in the analysis, evaluation, and mitigation of unavoidable environmental impacts of a project subject to CEQA.
- All interested parties are entitled to fair and balanced access to the CEQA process.
- CEQA represents a process that is “part of the solution, not part of the problem.”

Guiding Principles:

AEP *supports* proposals that:

- Enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of CEQA to achieve its original purposes.
- Limit the abuse of CEQA by deterring litigation for reasons other than protection of the natural and human environment.
- Encourage the submittal of written comments during the public review periods mandated by CEQA.
- Clarify that CEQA should address impacts on occupants of future projects who may be affected by existing environmental hazards (e.g., geotechnical, noise, air quality, on-site contamination).
- Strengthen the “tiering” relationship between CEQA documents.
- Provide for meaningful “infill” exemptions.
- Support infill development in existing urban areas and the development of additional housing opportunities near transit.

Proposals that would “streamline” the CEQA process should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, weighing the benefits of an abbreviated review and analytic process versus the public disclosure of a project’s environmental impacts.

AEP *opposes* proposals that would exempt projects from CEQA for the sake of expediency or at the expense of legitimate public interest.

AEP on Environmental Planning and Design

Background

Environmental planning addresses the public interest in urban and non-urban open space, outdoor recreation, preservation of natural communities, habitat conservation, coastal planning, scenic values, and other attributes of our physical environment.

Environmental planning also includes assessment of and planning for threats to public health and safety caused by potential earthquakes, flooding, and wildfires.

Core Values

- Promote good planning to be responsive to disasters including extreme weather, wildfires, flooding, sea level rise, and drought.
- California’s great diversity of natural environmental attributes is inseparable from the quality of life Californians have come to expect.
- Landscape diversity is as essential to the health and well-being of all Californians as it is to the thousands of plant, animal, fish, and invertebrate species that define California’s landscapes.

- Analysis and evaluation of a landscape’s “natural holding capacity” must be based on best available scientific information.
- Determining the sustainability of natural communities requires the ability to identify, measure, and forecast relevant environmental change over long periods of time.

Guiding Principles

AEP *supports* proposals that:

- Further the integration of environmental planning with land use and transportation planning.
- Provide for sound environmental design and sustainability.
- Provide for the effective preservation of landscape diversity.
- Establish clear guidelines for the protection of public health and safety from environmental hazards.

AEP *opposes* proposals that would diminish the environmental planning principles underlying the California Coastal Act, the Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act, the Williamson Act, and similar laws.

AEP on Biological Resources Conservation

Background

California is home to thousands of native plant and animal species, some found nowhere else in the world. The continued existence of many of these species in California is threatened by many factors.

The California Endangered Species Act, the Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act, and other sections of the Fish and Game Code are the principle laws guiding state policy with respect to the conservation of biological resources and special status species.

The continued existence of special status species is one measure of the health of the California environment. The loss of a special status species can start a chain reaction affecting the viability of other, more-common species and, potentially, can adversely affect habitats supporting other native and special status species.

Special status species are often best protected through an ecosystem preservation approach that relies on landscape-level conservation planning.

Core Values

- Conservation of California’s native wildlife and special status species, their habitats, and unique and dwindling wetland and riparian resources is intrinsically and consistently supported by a vast majority of Californians.
- The conservation of unique biological resources, habitats, and special status species is a critical factor in sustaining broader habitat areas that support large and diverse populations of other, more-common native species.
- It is possible and desirable to strike an acceptable balance between viable economic development and effective conservation of native and special status species and their habitats.

Guiding Principles

AEP *supports* proposals that:

- Aid in the protection of special status species and their habitats.
- Promote natural species diversity.
- Support research leading to the recovery of at-risk species.
- Support the acquisition and conservation of critical habitats.
- Ensure no net loss of sensitive habitat through enforceable mitigation measures.

AEP *opposes* proposals that would:

- Lessen protections for special status species.
- Adversely affect the ability to preserve wetland/riparian resources.
- Degrade the habitats of native species.
- Limit or reduce the practicality of landscape-level conservation and protection of species and habitats.

AEP on Climate Change and Sustainability

Background

Global warming—its causes and effects on climate change—is perhaps the most important environmental issue of our time.

California’s Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (“AB 32”) established a goal of returning California to 1990 levels of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. Senate Bill 32 (“SB 32”) continues the efforts started in AB 32 and establishes a goal of reducing GHG emissions in California to 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030. By executive order, Governor Brown also established a goal of being carbon neutral by 2045.

Reducing GHG emissions in accordance with these goals will require extraordinary effort. Among other things, projects subject to CEQA will be required to implement feasible mitigation to reduce their “carbon footprint” below thresholds supportive of state goals.

With the enactment of SB 375 in 2008 and SB 743 in 2013, important links between land use, regional housing needs, regional transportation plans and CEQA are established for the purpose of meeting GHG emission reduction goals related to vehicle miles travelled (VMT).

Core Values

- All sectors of the economy should contribute on a fair-share basis to reducing GHG emissions.
- Essential to attainment of the state’s GHG emissions reduction goals is a verifiable and transparent accounting system that tracks GHG reduction commitments of California businesses.
- AEP is committed to creating a more sustainable and resilient future for all Californians and plan to be part of addressing the challenges ahead.

Guiding Principles

AEP *supports* proposals that:

- Support efforts such as SB 32 that provide “substantial progress” toward the carbon neutrality goal incrementally in order to allow technology and society to transition.
- Encourage air districts and/or other agencies to adopt “significance thresholds” for GHG emissions for the purposes of CEQA analysis that are based on current legislatively adopted targets for which the state has developed a Scoping Plan (e.g. presently 2030, not 2050).
- Use the AEP Climate Change White Papers and other well-established protocols for community-wide GHG emissions inventories for use in Climate Action Plans in California.
- Improve the California Green Building Code to reduce energy consumption and increase the use of renewable energy in California, including electrification of homes and buildings.
- Accelerate decarbonization of electricity generation, the transportation system, and buildings and homes in due time.
- Encourage transit-oriented development and expanded transit service.
- Encourage jobs/housing balancing, including affordable housing, to reduce VMT.
- Encourage reduction, reuse, and recycling to reduce waste-related emissions.
- Promote maintenance and expansion of the state’s carbon sinks such as natural and working lands, and healthy forests.

Proposals that would expand CEQA streamlining processes to include projects other than qualified housing, infill, and transit projects should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.



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